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Mega Group, Maxwells and Mossad: the Spy Story at the Heart of the Jeffrey Epstein Scandal

WHITNEY WEBB • AUGUST 7, 2019 • 9,300 WORDS • [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

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The picture painted by the evidence is not a direct Epstein tie to a single intelligence agency but a web linking key members of the Mega Group, politicians, and officials in both the U.S. and Israel, and an organized-crime network with deep business and intelligence ties in both nations.

As billionaire pedophile and alleged sex-trafficker, Jeffrey Epstein sits in prison, reports have continued to surface about his reported links to intelligence, his financial ties to several companies and “charitable” foundations, and his friendships with the rich and powerful as well as top politicians.

While [Part I](#) and [Part II](#) of this series, “The Jeffrey Epstein Scandal: Too Big to Fail,” have focused on the widespread nature of sexual blackmail operations in recent American history and their ties to the heights of American political power and the U.S. intelligence community, one key aspect of Epstein’s own sex-trafficking and blackmail operation that warrants examination is Epstein’s ties to Israeli intelligence and his ties to the “informal” pro-Israel philanthropist faction known as “the Mega Group.”

The Mega Group’s role in the Epstein case has garnered some attention, as Epstein’s main financial patron for decades, billionaire Leslie Wexner, was a co-founder of the group that unites several well-known businessmen with a penchant for pro-Israel and ethno-philanthropy (i.e., philanthropy benefiting a single ethnic or ethno-religious group). However, as this report will show, another uniting factor among Mega Group members is deep ties to organized crime, specifically the organized crime network discussed in [Part I](#) of this series, which was largely led by notorious American mobster Meyer Lansky.

By virtue of the role of many Mega Group members as major political donors in both the U.S. and Israel, several of its most notable members have close ties to the governments of both countries as well as their intelligence communities. As this report and a subsequent report will show, the Mega Group also had close ties to two businessmen who worked for Israel's Mossad — Robert Maxwell and Marc Rich — as well as to top Israeli politicians, including past and present prime ministers with deep ties to Israel's intelligence community.

One of those businessmen working for the Mossad, Robert Maxwell, will be discussed at length in this report. Maxwell, who was a business partner of Mega Group co-founder Charles Bronfman, aided the successful Mossad plot to plant a trapdoor in U.S.-created software that was then sold to governments and companies throughout the world. That plot's success was largely due to the role of a close associate of then-President Ronald Reagan and an American politician close to Maxwell, who later helped aid Reagan in the cover-up of the Iran Contra scandal.

Years later, Maxwell's daughter — Ghislaine Maxwell — would join Jeffrey Epstein's "inner circle" at the same time Epstein was bankrolling a similar software program now being marketed for critical electronic infrastructure in the U.S. and abroad. That company has deep and troubling connections to Israeli military intelligence, associates of the Trump administration, and the Mega Group.

Epstein appears to have ties to Israeli intelligence and has well-documented ties to influential Israeli politicians and the Mega Group. Yet, those entities are not isolated in and of themselves, as many also connect to the organized crime network and powerful alleged pedophiles discussed in previous installments of this series.

Perhaps the best illustration of how the connections between many of these players often meld together can be seen in Ronald Lauder: a Mega Group member, former member of the Reagan administration, long-time donor to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israel's Likud Party, as well as a long-time friend of Donald Trump and Roy Cohn.

From cosmetics heir to political player

One often overlooked yet famous client and friend of Roy Cohn is the billionaire heir to the Estee Lauder cosmetics fortune, Ronald Lauder. Lauder is often described in the press as a "leading Jewish philanthropist" and is the president of the World Jewish Congress, yet his many media profiles tend to leave out his highly political past.

In [a statement](#) given by Lauder to *New York Times* reporter Maggie Haberman in 2018, the cosmetics heir noted that he has known Trump for over 50 years, going back at least to the early 1970s. According to Lauder, his relationship with Trump began when Trump was a student at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, which Lauder also attended.



President-elect Trump walks with Ronald Lauder after meeting at Mar-a-Lago, Dec. 28, 2016, in Palm Beach, Fla. Evan Vucci | AP

Though the exact nature of their early friendship is unclear, it is evident that they shared many of the same connections, including to the man who would later count them both as his clients, Roy Cohn. While much has been said of the ties between Cohn and Trump, Cohn was particularly close to Lauder's mother, Estee Lauder (born Josephine Mentzer). Estee was even counted among Cohn's most high-profile friends in [his New York Times obituary](#).

A small window into the Lauder-Cohn relationship surfaced briefly in [a 2016 article](#) in *Politico* about a 1981 dinner party held at Cohn's weekend home in Greenwich, Connecticut. The party was attended by Ronald Lauder's parents, Estee and Joe, as well as Trump and his then-wife Ivana, who [had a weekend home](#) just two miles away. That party was held soon after Cohn had helped Reagan secure the presidency and had reached the height of his political influence. At the party, Cohn offered toasts to Reagan and to then-Senator for New York Alfonse D'Amato, who [would later urge](#) Ronald Lauder to run for political office.

Two years later, in 1983, Ronald Lauder — whose only professional experience at that point was working for his parent's cosmetics company — [was appointed](#) to serve as United States Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for European and NATO Affairs. Soon after his appointment, he [served on](#) the Dinner Tribute Committee for a dinner hosted by the Jewish fraternal and strongly pro-Israel organization B'nai B'rith, the parent organization of the controversial Anti-Defamation League (ADL), in Roy Cohn's honor. Cohn's influential father, Albert Cohn, was [the long-time president](#) of B'nai B'rith's powerful New England-New York chapter and Roy Cohn himself was a member of B'nai B'rith's Banking and Finance Lodge.

The dinner [specifically sought](#) to honor Cohn for his pro-Israel advocacy and his efforts to "fortify" Israel's economy, and its honorary chairmen included media mogul Rupert Murdoch, Donald Trump and then-head of Bear Stearns Alan Greenberg, all of whom [are connected](#) to Jeffrey Epstein.

During his time as deputy assistant secretary of defense, Lauder was also very active in Israeli politics and had already become an ally of the then-Israeli representative to the United Nations

and future prime minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu. Lauder would go on to be one of the most important individuals in Netanyahu's rise to power, particularly during his upset victory in 1996, and [a major financier](#) of Israel's right-wing Likud Party.

In 1986, the year that Roy Cohn died, Lauder left his post at the Pentagon and became the U.S. ambassador to Austria, where his tenure was shaped by [his confrontations](#) with the then-Austrian president and former Nazi collaborator, Kurt Waldheim. Lauder's interest in Austrian politics has continued well into recent years, culminating in accusations that he [sought to manipulate](#) Austrian elections in 2012.

After leaving his ambassadorship, Lauder [founded](#) the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation in 1987 and later went on to run for Mayor of New York against Rudy Giuliani in 1989. Lauder [was encouraged](#) to run by then-Senator Alfonse D'Amato, who had close ties to Roy Cohn and his long-time law partner Tom Bolan, who [was D'Amato's adviser](#). At the aforementioned 1983 B'nai B'rith dinner honoring Cohn, D'Amato was the featured speaker.

The likely reason was that Giuliani, though once an ally of the "Roy Cohn machine," was at the time [deeply disliked](#) by the late Cohn's associates for prosecuting Cohn's former law partner, Stanley Friedman, for racketeering, conspiracy and other charges. Giuliani also had a history of bitter disagreements with D'Amato. Lauder's primary campaign, though unsuccessful, was noted for its viciousness and its cost, as it [burned through](#) more than \$13 million.

A few years later, in the early 1990s, Lauder would join a newly formed group that has long evaded scrutiny from the media but has recently become of interest in connection with the Jeffrey Epstein scandal: the Mega Group.

Lauder, Epstein and the mysterious Austrian passport

Before getting to the Mega Group, it is worth noting one particular act apparently undertaken by Lauder while he was U.S. ambassador to Austria that has recently come to light in relation to the arrest in early July of Jeffrey Epstein, a finding first reported by journalist Edward Szall. When police recently discovered an Austrian passport with Epstein's picture and a fake name after raiding his Manhattan residence, the source and purpose of the passport came under media scrutiny.

According to [the Associated Press](#), Epstein's defense lawyers specifically argued that "a friend gave it to him [Epstein] in the 1980s after some Jewish-Americans were informally advised to carry identification bearing a non-Jewish name when traveling internationally during a period when hijackings were more common." This claim appears to be related to concerns that followed the [hijacking of Air France Flight 139](#) in 1976 when Israeli and Jewish hostages were separated from other hostages based largely on the passports in their possession.

Given that Epstein was unable to meet the conventional qualifications for an Austrian passport — including long-term residency in Austria (the passport lists him as a resident of Saudi Arabia) and fluency in German — it appears that the only way to have acquired an Austrian

passport was by *unconventional* means, meaning assistance from a well-connected Austrian official or foreign diplomat with clout in Austria.



Ronald Lauder, right, and Austrian Chancellor Viktor Klima pose with students from the Lauder Chabad School in Vienna, Austria in 1999.
Martin Gnedt | AP

Lauder, then-ambassador to Austria for the Reagan administration, would have been well-positioned to acquire such a passport, particularly for the reason cited by Epstein's attorneys that Jewish-Americans could be targeted during travel, and in light of Lauder's very public concerns over threats Jews face from certain terror groups. Furthermore, the passport had been issued in 1987, when Lauder was still serving as an ambassador.

In addition, Lauder was well-connected to Epstein's former patron — former head of Bear Stearns Alan Greenberg, who had hired Epstein in the late 1970s immediately after the latter was fired from the Dalton School — and Donald Trump, another friend of Lauder and Greenberg who began his friendship with Epstein in 1987, the same year the fake Austrian passport was issued. In 1987, Epstein also began his relationship with his principal financier, Leslie Wexner, who is also closely associated with Lauder (though some sources claim that Epstein and Wexner first met in 1985 but that their strong business relationship was not established until 1987).

Though Epstein's defense attorney declined to reveal the identity of the "friend" who provided him with the fake Austrian passport, Lauder was both well-positioned to acquire it in Austria and also deeply connected to the Mega Group, which was co-founded by Epstein's patron Leslie Wexner and to which Epstein has many connections. These connections to both the Austrian government and to Epstein's mentor make Lauder the most likely person to have acquired the document on Epstein's behalf.

Furthermore, Epstein and the Mega Group's ties to the Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad, also suggest Lauder was involved in procuring the passport, in light of his close ties to the Israeli government and the fact that Mossad has a history of using ambassadors abroad to procure false, foreign passports for its operatives.

Lauder himself has been alleged to have ties to Mossad, as he is a long-time funder of IDC Herzliya, an Israeli university [closely associated with](#) Mossad and their recruiters as well as Israeli military intelligence. Lauder even [founded](#) IDC Herzliya's Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy.

Furthermore, Lauder co-founded the Eastern European broadcasting network CETV with Mark Palmer, a former U.S. diplomat, Kissinger aide and Reagan speechwriter. Palmer is better known for co-founding the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), an organization often described as an accessory to U.S. intelligence, and one whose first president confessed to [the Washington Post](#) that "a lot of what we do today was done covertly 25 years ago by the CIA." A 2001 report in the *Evening Standard* noted that Epstein [once claimed](#) that during the 1980s he worked for the CIA, but Epstein later backed away from that assertion.

The origins of the Mega Group Mafia

The Mega Group — a secretive group of billionaires to which Lauder belongs — was formed in 1991 by Charles Bronfman and Leslie Wexner, the latter of whom has received considerable media scrutiny following the July arrest of his former protege Jeffrey Epstein. [Media profiles](#) of the group paint it as "a loosely organized club of 20 of the nation's wealthiest and most influential Jewish businessmen" focused on "philanthropy and Jewishness," with membership dues upwards of \$30,000 per year. Yet several of its most prominent members have ties to organized crime.

Mega Group members founded and/or are closely associated with some of the most well-known pro-Israel organizations. For instance, members Charles Bronfman and Michael Steinhardt [formed](#) Birthright Taglit with the backing of then- and current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Steinhardt, an atheist, has stated that his motivation in helping to found the group was to advance [his own belief](#) that devotion to and faith in the state of Israel should serve as "a substitute for [Jewish] theology."

Other well-known groups associated with the Mega Group include the World Jewish Congress — whose past president, Edgar Bronfman, and current president, Ronald Lauder, are both Mega Group members — and B'nai B'rith, particularly its spin-off known as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). The Bronfman brothers were major donors to the ADL, with Edgar Bronfman [serving as](#) the ADL's honorary national vice-chair for several years.



Former Israeli president Shimon Peres, second from left, listens to Edgar Bronfman during a 1995 lunch thrown in Peres' honor. From left are: Laurence Tisch, Chairman, President and Chief executive officer of CBS; Israeli Ambassador to the United States. Itamar Rabinowitz and Bronfman. David Karp | AP

When Edgar Bronfman died in 2013, long-time ADL Director [Abe Foxman said](#), “Edgar was for many years Chair of our Liquor Industry Division, Chair of our New York Appeal, and one of our most significant benefactors.” Other Mega Group members that are donors and major supporters of the ADL include [Ronald Lauder](#), [Michael Steinhardt](#) and the late [Max Fisher](#). As previously mentioned, Roy Cohn’s father was a long-time leader of B’nai B’rith’s influential New England-New York chapter and Cohn was later a celebrated member of its banking and finance lodge.

In addition, Mega Group members have also been key players in the pro-Israel lobby in the United States. For instance, Max Fisher of the Mega Group [founded](#) the National Jewish Coalition, [now known as](#) the Republican Jewish Coalition — the main [pro-Israel neoconservative political lobbying group](#), known for its support of hawkish policies, and whose current chief patrons, Sheldon Adelson and Bernard Marcus, are among Donald Trump’s top donors.

Though the Mega Group has officially existed only since 1991, the use of “philanthropy” to provide cover for more unscrupulous lobbying or business activities was pioneered decades earlier by Sam Bronfman, the father of Mega Group members Edgar and Charles Bronfman. While other North American elites like J.D. Rockefeller had previously used philanthropic giving as a means of laundering their reputations, Bronfman’s approach to philanthropy was unique because it was focused on giving specifically to other members of his own ethno-religious background.

Sam Bronfman, as was detailed in [Part I](#) of this series, had long-standing deep ties to organized crime, specifically Meyer Lanksy’s organized crime syndicate. Yet, Bronfman’s private ambition, according to those close to him, was to become a respected member of high

society. As a consequence, Bronfman worked hard to remove the stain that his mob associations had left on his public reputation in Canada and abroad. He accomplished this by becoming a leader in Canada's Zionist movement and, by the end of the 1930s, he was head of the Canadian Jewish Congress and had begun to make a name for himself as a philanthropist for Jewish causes.

Yet even some of Bronfman's activism and philanthropy had hints of the mobster-like reputation he tried so hard to shake. For instance, Bronfman was actively involved in the illegal shipping of arms to Zionist paramilitaries in Palestine prior to 1948, specifically as a co-founder of the National Conference for Israeli and Jewish Rehabilitation that smuggled weapons to the paramilitary group Haganah.

At the same time Bronfman was abetting the illegal smuggling of weapons to the Haganah, his associates in the criminal underworld were doing the same. After World War II, close aides of David Ben-Gurion, who would later become the first prime minister of Israel and was instrumental in the founding of Mossad, forged tight-knit relationships with Meyer Lansky, Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel, Mickey Cohen and other Jewish gangsters of the period. They used their clandestine networks to establish a vast arms smuggling network between the United States and Zionist settlements in Palestine, arming both the Haganah and the Irgun paramilitary groups. As noted in Part I of this report, at the same time these gangsters were aiding the illegal arming of Zionist paramilitaries, they were strengthening their ties to U.S. intelligence that had first been formally (though covertly) established in World War II.

After Israel was founded, Sam Bronfman worked with future Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to negotiate the sale of Canadian armaments at half-price to Israel and the bargain weapons purchase was paid for entirely by a fundraising dinner hosted by Bronfman and his wife. Many years later, Peres would go on to introduce another future prime minister of Israel, Ehud Barak, to Jeffrey Epstein.

The rest of the Bronfman family's march on "the road to respectability" was undertaken by Bronfman's children, who married into aristocratic families such as the European Rothschilds and the Wall Street "royalty" of the Lehmans and the Loeb's.

The Bronfmans' newfound respectability did not mean that their association with the Lansky-led criminal empire had dissolved. Indeed, prominent members of the Seagrams dynasty came under fire in the 1960s and 1970s for their close association with Willie "Obie" Obront, a major figure in Canadian organized crime, whom Canadian professor Stephen Schneider has referred to as the Meyer Lansky of Canada.

However, Edgar and Charles Bronfman were hardly the only members of the Mega Group with deep and long-standing ties to the Lansky-led National Crime Syndicate. Indeed, one of the group's prominent members, hedge fund manager Michael Steinhardt, opened up about his own family ties to Lansky in his autobiography *No Bull: My Life in and out the Markets*, where he noted that his father, Sol "Red McGee" Steinhardt, was Lansky's jewel fence of choice and a major player in New York's criminal underworld. Sol Steinhardt was also his son's first client on Wall Street and helped him jumpstart his career in finance.

The ties between the Mega Group and the National Crime Syndicate don't stop there. Another prominent member of the Mega Group with ties to this same criminal network is Max Fisher, who has been described as Wexner's mentor and is also alleged [to have worked](#) with Detroit's "Purple Gang" during Prohibition and beyond. The Purple Gang were part of the network that smuggled Bronfman liquor from Canada into the United State during Prohibition, and one of its founders, Abe Bernstein, was [a close associate](#) of both Meyer Lansky and Moe Dalitz. Fisher was a [key adviser](#) to several U.S. presidents, beginning with Dwight D. Eisenhower, as well as to Henry Kissinger.



Max Fisher, center, and Henry Kissinger, right, meet with leaders of Jewish organizations prior to Kissinger's 1975 Middle East trip. Henry Burroughs | AP

In addition to Fisher, Mega Group member Ronald Lauder was connected to Roy Cohn and Tom Bolan, both of whom were closely associated with this same Lansky-led crime network (see [Part I](#) and [Part II](#)) and who regularly represented top Mafia figures in court. Furthermore, another member of the Mega Group, director Steven Spielberg, is [a well-known protege](#) of Lew Wasserman, the mob-connected media mogul and long-time backer of Ronald Reagan's film and later political career, discussed in [Part II](#) of this series.

One surprise connection to Cohn involves Mega Group member, and former president of U.S. weapons firm General Dynamics, Lester Crown, whose brother-in-law is David Schine, Cohn's confidant and alleged lover during the McCarthy hearings, [whose relationship with Cohn](#) helped bring about the downfall of McCarthyism.

Another member of the Mega Group worth noting is Laurence Tisch, who owned *CBS News* for several years and founded Loews Corporation. Tisch is notable for his [work for](#) the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the precursor to the CIA, where Donald Barr, who hired Epstein at the Dalton School, also served and which forged ties with Lansky's criminal empire during World War II.

Wexner's mansions and the Shapiro murder

Leslie “Les” Wexner, the other Mega Group co-founder, also has ties to organized crime. Wexner’s ties to Jeffrey Epstein have come under scrutiny following the latter’s recent arrest, as Wexner was the only publicly acknowledged client of Epstein’s suspicious hedge fund, the source of much of this wealth, and [the previous owner](#) of Epstein’s \$56 million Manhattan townhouse, which Wexner transferred to an Epstein-controlled entity for free.

Before Epstein received the townhouse, Wexner appears to have used the residence for some unconventional purposes, noted in [a 1996 New York Times article](#) on the then-Wexner-owned residence, which included “a bathroom reminiscent of James Bond movies: hidden beneath a stairway, lined with lead to provide shelter from attack and supplied with closed-circuit television screens and a telephone, both concealed in a cabinet beneath the sink.” The *Times* article does not speculate as to the purpose of this equipment, though the allusion to famous fictional superspy James Bond suggests that it may have been used to snoop on guests or conduct electronic surveillance.

The 1996 *Times* article also noted that, after Wexner bought the residence for \$13.2 million in 1989, he spent millions more decorating and furnishing the home, including the addition of the electronic equipment in the “James Bond” bathroom, only to apparently never live in it. The *Times*, which interviewed Epstein for the piece, quoted him as saying that “Les never spent more than two months there.” Epstein told the *Times*, which identified Epstein as Wexner’s “protege and one of his financial advisers,” that the house, by that time, already belonged to him.

That same year, Epstein was commissioning artwork for Wexner’s Ohio mansion. A [recent article](#) from the *Times* noted that:

In the summer of 1996, Maria Farmer was working on an art project for Mr. Epstein in Mr. Wexner’s Ohio mansion. While she was there, Mr. Epstein sexually assaulted her, according to an affidavit Ms. Farmer filed earlier this year in federal court in Manhattan. She said that she fled the room and called the police, but that Mr. Wexner’s security staff refused to let her leave for 12 hours.”

Farmer’s account strongly suggests that, given the behavior of his personal security staff at his mansion following Epstein’s alleged assault on Farmer, Wexner was well aware of Epstein’s predatory behavior towards young women. This is compounded by claims made by Alan Dershowitz — a former lawyer for and friend of Epstein’s, who has also been accused of raping underage girls — that Wexner [has also been accused](#) of raping underage girls exploited by Epstein on at least seven occasions.

The presence of the electronic equipment in his home’s bathroom, other oddities related to the townhouse, and aspects of the links between Epstein and Wexner suggest there is more to Wexner, who has rather successfully developed a public image of a respectable businessman and philanthropist, much like other prominent members of the Mega Group.



Leslie Wexner and his wife Abigail tour the “Transfigurations” exhibit at the Wexner Center for the Arts. Jay LaPrete | AP

However, bits and pieces of Wexner’s private secrets have occasionally bubbled up, only to be subjected to rapid cover-ups amidst concerns of “libeling” the powerful and well-connected billionaire “philanthropist.”

In 1985, Columbus (Ohio) lawyer Arthur Shapiro **was murdered** in broad daylight at point-blank range in what was largely referred to as a “mob style murder.” The homicide still remains unsolved, likely due to the fact that then-Columbus Police Chief James Jackson ordered the destruction of key documents of his department’s investigation into the murder.

Jackson’s ordering of the documents’ destruction came to light years later in 1996, when he was under investigation for corruption. According to **the Columbus Dispatch**, Jackson justified the destruction of one “**viable and valuable**” report because he felt that it “was so filled with wild speculation about prominent business leaders that it was potentially libelous.” The nature of this “wild speculation” was that “millionaire businessmen in Columbus and Youngstown were linked to the ‘mob-style murder.’”

Though Jackson’s efforts were meant to keep this “libelous” report far from public view, it was eventually **obtained by Bob Fitakis** — attorney, journalist, and executive director of the Columbus Institute for Contemporary Journalism — after he was “accidentally” sent a copy of the report in 1998 as part of a public records request.

The report, titled “**Shapiro Homicide Investigation: Analysis and Hypothesis**,” names Leslie Wexner as linked “with associates reputed to be organized crime figures” and also lists the names of businessman Jack Kessler, former Columbus City Council President and Wexner associate Jerry Hammond, and former Columbus City Council member Les Wright as also being involved in Shapiro’s murder.

The report also noted that Arthur Shapiro’s law firm — Schwartz, Shapiro, Kelm & Warren — represented Wexner’s company, The Limited, and states that “prior to his death, Arthur

Shapiro managed this account [The Limited] for the law firm.” It also noted that, at the time of his death, Shapiro “was the subject of an investigation by the Internal Revenue Service because he had failed to file income tax returns for some seven years prior to his death, and he had invested in some questionable tax shelters.” It also stated that his death prevented Shapiro from his planned testimony at a grand jury hearing about these “questionable tax shelters.”

As to Wexner’s alleged links to organized crime, the report focuses on the close business relationship between Wexner’s The Limited and Francis Walsh, whose trucking company “[had] done an excess of 90 percent of the Limited’s trucking business around the time of Shapiro’s murder,” according to the report. Walsh was named in [a 1988 indictment](#) as a “co-conspirator” of Genovese crime family boss Anthony “Fat Tony” Salerno, whose long-time lawyer was Roy Cohn; and the Shapiro murder report stated that Walsh was “still considered associates of the Genovese/LaRocca crime family, and Walsh was still providing truck transportation for The Limited.”

Notably, the Genovese crime family has long formed a key part of the National Crime Syndicate, as its former head, Charles “Lucky” Luciano, [co-created](#) the criminal organization with his close friend Meyer Lansky. Upon Luciano’s imprisonment and subsequent deportation from the United States, Lansky took over the syndicate’s U.S. operations and his association with Luciano’s successors continued until Lansky’s death in 1983.

The “Mega” Mystery and the Mossad

In May 1997, the *Washington Post* broke [an explosive story](#) — long since forgotten — based on an intercepted phone call made between a Mossad official in the U.S. and his superior in Tel Aviv that discussed the Mossad’s efforts to obtain a secret U.S. government document. According to the *Post*, the Mossad official stated during the phone call that “Israeli Ambassador Eliahu Ben Elissar had asked him whether he could obtain a copy of the letter given to [Palestinian leader Yasser] Arafat by [then-Secretary of State Warren] Christopher on Jan. 16, the day after the Hebron accord was signed by Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.”

The *Post* article continued:

According to a source who viewed a copy of the NSA transcript of the conversation, the intelligence officer, speaking in Hebrew, said, “The ambassador wants me to go to Mega to get a copy of this letter.’ The source said the supervisor in Tel Aviv rejected the request, saying, “This is not something we use Mega for.”

The leaked communication led to an investigation that sought to identify an individual code-named “Mega” that the *Post* said “may be someone in the U.S. government who has provided information to the Israelis in the past,” a concern that subsequently spawned a fruitless FBI investigation. The Mossad [later claimed](#) that “Mega” was merely a codeword for the U.S.’

CIA, but the FBI and NSA were unconvinced by that claim and **believed** that it was a senior U.S. government official that had potentially once been involved in working with Jonathan Pollard, the former U.S. naval intelligence analyst later convicted of spying for the Mossad.

Almost one year to the day after the “Mega” spy scandal broke, the *Wall Street Journal* was **the first outlet** to report on the existence of a little-known organization of billionaires that was “informally” called the Mega Group and had been founded years prior in 1991. The report made no mention of the spy scandal that had spread concerns of Israeli espionage in the U.S. only a year prior. However, the group’s distinctive “informal” name and the connections of its members to the Mossad and to high-ranking Israeli politicians, including prime ministers, raise the possibility that “Mega” was not an individual, as the FBI and NSA had believed, but a *group*.

In 1997, when the “Mega” spy scandal broke, Netanyahu had recently become prime minister of Israel after an upset victory, a victory that was **largely credited** to one well-connected Netanyahu backer in particular, Ronald Lauder. Beyond being a major donor, Lauder had brought Arthur Finklestein on to work for Netanyahu’s 1996 campaign, whose strategies were credited for Netanyahu’s surprise win. Netanyahu was close enough to Lauder that he personally enlisted Lauder and George Nader to serve as his peace envoys to Syria.



Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife Sara with Ronald Lauder in 1997. Photo | Reuters

Nader, who was connected to the Trump 2016 campaign and Trump ally and **Blackwater** founder Erik Prince, was **recently hit** with federal child sex trafficking charges last month, soon after Jeffrey Epstein had been arrested on similar charges. At the time Nader was picked to work with Lauder on Netanyahu’s behalf, he had **already been caught** possessing large amounts of child pornography on two separate occasions, first in 1984 and later in 1990.

This strong connection between Netanyahu and Lauder during the time of the 1997 “Mega” spy scandal is important considering Mossad answers directly to Israel’s prime minister.

Another possible connection between the Mega Group and the Mossad owes to the Mega Group’s ties to Meyer Lansky’s criminal network. As was detailed in Part I, Lansky had established deep ties to U.S. intelligence after World War II and was also connected to the

Mossad through Mossad official Tibor Rosenbaum, whose bank was frequently used by Lansky to launder money. In addition, Lansky collaborated on at least one occasion with notorious Mossad “superspy” Rafi Eitan, who he [helped acquire](#) sensitive electronic equipment possessed only by the CIA but coveted by Israeli intelligence. Eitan is best known in the U.S. for being the Mossad handler of Jonathan Pollard.

Notably, Eitan was [the main source](#) of claims that the code-word “Mega” used by the Mossad officials in 1997 referred to the CIA and not to a potential source in the U.S. government once linked to Pollard’s spying activities, making his claims as to the true meaning of the term somewhat dubious.

Given that the organized crime network tied to the Mega Group had ties to both U.S. and Israeli intelligence, the “Mega” codeword could plausibly have referred to this secretive group of billionaires. More supporting evidence for this theory comes from the fact that prominent members of the Mega Group were business partners of Mossad agents, including media mogul Robert Maxwell and commodities trader Marc Rich.

The mysterious Maxwells

The Maxwell family has become a source of renewed media interest following Jeffrey Epstein’s arrest, as Ghislaine Maxwell, long described in the media as a British “socialite,” was publicly cited as Epstein’s long-time “on and off” girlfriend, and Epstein’s victims, as well as former wives of Epstein’s friends, have claimed that she was Epstein’s “pimp” and procured underage girls for his sexual blackmail operation. Ghislaine Maxwell is [also alleged](#) to have engaged in the rape of the girls she procured for Epstein and to have used them to produce child pornography.

Ghislaine was the favorite and youngest daughter of media mogul Robert Maxwell. Maxwell, born Jan Ludvick Hoch, had joined the British Army in World War II. Afterwards, according to authors [John Loftus and Mark Aarons](#), he greatly influenced the Czechoslovakian government’s decision to arm Zionist paramilitaries during the 1948 war that resulted in Israel’s creation as a state, and Maxwell himself was also involved in the smuggling of aircraft parts to Israel.

Around this time, Maxwell was approached by British intelligence outfit MI6 and offered a position that Maxwell ultimately declined. MI6 then [classified](#) him as “Zionist — loyal only to Israel” and made him a person of interest. He later became an agent of the Mossad, according to several books including *Robert Maxwell: Israel’s Superspy* by Gordon Thomas and Martin Dillon. Furthermore, Seymour Hersh’s *The Samson Option: Israel’s Nuclear Arsenal and American Foreign Policy* alleges ties between Maxwell and Israeli intelligence.

According to [Victor Ostrovsky](#), a former Mossad case officer:

Mossad was financing many of its operations in Europe from money stolen from Maxwell’s newspaper pension fund. They got their hands on the funds almost as

soon as Maxwell made the purchase of the Mirror Newspaper Group with money lent to him by Mossad.”

In exchange for his services, the Mossad helped Maxwell satisfy his sexual appetite during his visits to Israel, [providing him](#) with prostitutes, “the service maintained for blackmail purposes.” It was later revealed that the hotel in which he stayed in Israel was bugged with cameras, allowing the Mossad to acquire “a small library of video footage of Maxwell in sexually compromising positions.” As with the CIA, the Mossad’s use of blackmail against both friend and foe is [well-documented](#) and known to be [extensive](#).

Maxwell was also a close associate and friend of Israeli “superspy” Rafi Eitan, who, as previously mentioned, was Jonathan Pollard’s handler and who had previously worked directly with Meyer Lansky. Eitan [had learned](#) of a revolutionary new software being used by the U.S. government known as “Promis” from Earl Brian, a long-time associate and aide to Ronald Reagan. Promis is often considered the forerunner to the “Prism” software used by spy agencies today and was developed by William Hamilton, who leased the software to the U.S. government through his company, Inslaw, in 1982.



Ariel Sharon (right) meets with Robert Maxwell in Jerusalem on Feb. 20, 1990. Photo | AP

According to author and former *BBC* investigative journalist Gordon Thomas, Brian [was angry](#) that the U.S. Department of Justice was successfully using Promis to go after organized crime and money-laundering activities and Eitan felt that the program could aid Israel. At the time, Eitan was the director of the now defunct Israeli military intelligence agency Lekem, which gathered scientific and technical intelligence abroad from both public and covert sources, especially in relation to Israel’s nuclear weapons program.

A plan was hatched to [install a “trapdoor”](#) into the software and then market Promis throughout the world, providing the Mossad with invaluable intelligence on the operations of its enemies and allies while also providing Eitan and Brian with copious amounts of cash. According to the testimony of ex-Mossad official Ari Ben-Menashe, Brian [provided a copy](#) of Promis to Israel’s military intelligence, which contacted an Israeli American programmer living in California who then planted the “trapdoor” in the software. The CIA was later said to have installed its *own* trapdoor in the software but it is unknown if they did so with a version of the already bugged software and how widely it was adopted relative to the version bugged by Israeli intelligence.

After the trapdoor was inserted, the problem became selling the bugged version of the software to governments as well as private companies around the world, particularly in areas of interest. Brian first attempted to buy out Inslaw and Promis and then use that same company to sell the bugged version.

Unsuccessful, Brian turned to his close friend, then-Attorney General Ed Meese whose Justice Department then [abruptly refused](#) to make the payments to Inslaw that were stipulated by the contract, essentially using the software for free, which Inslaw claimed to be theft. Some have speculated that Meese’s role in that decision was shaped, not only by his friendship with Brian, but the fact that his wife was [a major investor](#) in Brian’s business ventures. Meese would later become an adviser to Donald Trump when he was president-elect.

Inslaw was forced to declare bankruptcy as a result of Meese’s actions and sued the Justice Department. The court [later found](#) that the Meese-led department “took, converted, stole” the software through “trickery, fraud and deceit.”

With Inslaw out of the way, Brian sold the software all over the world. Eitan later recruited Robert Maxwell to become another Promis salesman, which he did remarkably well, even succeeding in selling the software to Soviet intelligence and [conspiring with](#) Republican Texas Senator John Tower to have the software adopted by the U.S. government laboratory at Los Alamos. Dozens of countries used the software on their most carefully guarded computer systems, unaware that Mossad now had access to everything Promis touched.

Whereas the Mossad’s past reliance on gathering intelligence had relied on the same tactics used by its equivalents in the U.S. and elsewhere, the widespread adoption of the Promis software, largely through the actions of Earl Brian and Robert Maxwell, gave the Mossad a way to gather not just troves of counterintelligence data, but also blackmail on other intelligence agencies and powerful figures.

Indeed, Promis’ backdoor and adoption by intelligence agencies all over the world essentially provided the Mossad with access to troves of blackmail that the CIA and FBI had acquired on their friends and foes for over half a century. Strangely, in recent years, the FBI has [sought to hide](#) information related to Robert Maxwell’s connection to the Promis scandal.

According to [journalist Robert Fisk](#), Maxwell was also involved in the Mossad abduction of Israeli nuclear weapons whistleblower Vanunu Mordechai. Mordechai had attempted to provide

the media with information on the extent of Israel's nuclear weapons program, which was eventually published by the *Sunday Times of London*. Yet, Mordechai had also contacted the *Daily Mirror* with the information, the *Mirror* being an outlet that was owned by Maxwell and whose foreign editor was a close Maxwell associate and alleged Mossad asset, Nicholas Davies. Journalist Seymour Hersh alleged that Davies had also been involved in Israeli arms deals.

Per Fisk, it was Maxwell who contacted the Israeli Embassy in London and told them of Mordechai's activities. This led to Mordechai's entrapment by a female Mossad agent who seduced him as part of a "honey trap" operation that led to his kidnapping and later imprisonment in Israel. Mordechai served an 18-year sentence, 12 years of which were in solitary confinement.

Then, there is the issue of Maxwell's death, widely cited by mainstream and independent media alike as [suspicious and a potential homicide](#). According to authors Gordon Thomas and Martin Dillon, Maxwell had sealed his own fate when he attempted to threaten top Mossad officials with the exposure of certain operations if they did not help him rescue his media empire from crippling debt and financial difficulties. Many of Maxwell's [creditors](#), who had grown increasingly displeased with the media mogul, were Israeli and several of them were alleged to be Mossad-connected themselves.

Thomas and Dillon argue in [their biography](#) of Maxwell's life that the Mossad felt that Maxwell had become more of a liability than an asset and killed him on his yacht three months after he demanded the bailout. On the other extreme are theories that suggest Maxwell committed suicide because of the financial difficulties his empire faced.



Ghislaine Maxwell, far right, Robert Maxwell's daughter, looks on his casket is unloaded from a plane in Jerusalem, Nov. 8, 1991. Heribert Proepper | AP

Some have taken Maxwell's funeral held in Israel as the country's "official" confirmation of Maxwell's service to the Mossad, as it was likened to a state funeral and attended [by no less than six](#) serving and former heads of Israeli intelligence. During his funeral service in Jerusalem, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir eulogized him and [stated](#): "He has done

more for Israel than can today be said.” Other [eulogies](#) were given by future Prime Ministers Ehud Olmert (then Health Minister) and Shimon Peres, with the latter [also praising](#) Maxwell’s “services” on behalf of Israel.

Swimming in the same swamp

As he built his business empire — and even became a member of Parliament, Maxwell was also doing work for Israeli intelligence, as several of the Israeli companies in which he invested became fronts for the Mossad. In addition, as he became a media mogul, he developed a bitter rivalry with Rupert Murdoch, a close friend of Roy Cohn and an influential figure in American and British media.

Maxwell also partnered with the Bronfman brothers, Edgar and Charles — key figures in the Mega Group. In 1989 Maxwell and Charles Bronfman [partnered up](#) to bid on the *Jerusalem Post* newspaper and the *Post* described the two men as “two of the world’s leading Jewish financiers” and their interest in the venture as “developing *The Jerusalem Post* and expanding its influence among world Jewry.” A year prior, Maxwell and Bronfman [had become](#) top shareholders in the Israeli pharmaceutical company Teva.

Maxwell also worked with Charles Bronfman’s brother Edgar in the late 1980s to convince the Soviet Union to allow Soviet Jews to immigrate to Israel. Edgar’s efforts in this regard [have received more attention](#), as it was a defining moment of his decades-long presidency of the World Jewish Congress, of which Ronald Lauder is currently president. Yet, Maxwell had also made [considerable use](#) of his contacts in the Soviet government in this effort.

Maxwell also moved in the circles of the network previously described in Parts I and II in this series. A key example of this is [the May 1989 party](#) Maxwell hosted on his yacht, the *Lady Ghislaine* — named for his youngest daughter and Epstein’s future “girlfriend.” Attendees of the party included Roy Cohn’s protege Donald Trump and his long-time law partner Tom Bolan. A close friend of Nancy Reagan was also present, journalist Mike Wallace, as was literary agent Mort Janklow, who represented Ronald Reagan and two of Cohn’s closest friends: journalists William Safire and Barbara Walters.

The CEO of what would soon become Time Warner, Steve Ross, was also invited to the exclusive event. Ross’ presence is notable, as he had built his business empire [largely through his association](#) with New York crime lords Manny Kimmel and Abner “Longy” Zwillman. Zwillman was a close friend of Meyer Lansky, Michael Steinhardt’s father, and Sam Bronfman, father of Edgar and Charles Bronfman.

Another attendee of the Maxwell yacht party was former Secretary of the Navy and former Henry Kissinger staffer Jon Lehman, who would go on to associate with the controversial neoconservative think tank, Project for a New American Century. Prior to being secretary of the Navy, Lehman had been president of the Abington Corporation, which hired arch-neocon Richard Perle to manage [the portfolio](#) of Israeli arms dealers Shlomo Zabłudowicz and his son Chaim, who paid Abington \$10,000 month. A scandal arose when those [payments continued](#) after both Lehman and Perle joined the Reagan Department of Defense and while

Perle was working to persuade the Pentagon to buy arms from companies linked to Zabludowicz. Perle had been part of the Reagan transition team along with Roy Cohn's long-time friend and law partner Tom Bolan (another Maxwell yacht guest).

In addition to Lehman, another former Kissinger staffer, Thomas Pickering was present at Maxwell's yacht part. Pickering played a minor role in the Iran-Contra affair and, at the time of the Maxwell yacht party, he was U.S. ambassador to Israel. Senator John Tower (R-TX), who allegedly conspired with Maxwell in the Mossad-bugged Promis software at the Los Alamos laboratories, was also present. Tower died just months before Maxwell in [a suspicious plane crash](#).

Ghislaine Maxwell was also at this rather notable event. After her father's mysterious death and alleged murder on the same yacht that bears her name in 1991, she quickly packed her bags and moved to New York City. There, she soon made the acquaintance of Jeffrey Epstein and, a few years later, developed close ties to the Clinton family, which will be discussed in the next installment of this series.

Jeffrey Epstein and the new "Promis"

After it was revealed that Epstein had evaded stricter sentencing in 2008 due to his links to "intelligence," it was the Mossad ties of Ghislaine Maxwell's father that have led many to speculate that Epstein's sexual blackmail operation was sharing incriminating information with the Mossad. Former *CBS* executive producer and current journalist for the media outlet *Narativ*, Zev Shalev, has [since claimed](#) that he independently confirmed that Epstein was tied directly to the Mossad.



Donald and Melania Trump with Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell at the Mar-a-Lago club, Palm Beach, Florida in 2000. Photo | Davidoff

Epstein was a long-time friend of former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who has long-standing and deep ties to Israel's intelligence community. Their decades-long friendship has been the source of recent political attacks targeting Barak, who is running in the Israeli elections against current Prime Minister Netanyahu later this year.

Barak is also close to Epstein's chief patron and Mega Group member Leslie Wexner, whose Wexner Foundation [gave Barak \\$2 million](#) in 2004 for a still unspecified research program. According to Barak, he was first introduced to Epstein by former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, who eulogized Robert Maxwell at his funeral and had decades-long ties with the Bronfman family going back to the early 1950s. Peres was also a [frequent participant in programs](#) funded by Leslie Wexner in Israel and [worked closely](#) with the Mossad for decades.

In 2015, a few years after Epstein's release from prison following his conviction for soliciting sex from a minor in 2008, Barak formed a company with Epstein with the chief purpose of investing in an Israeli start-up then known as Reporty. That company, now called Carbyne, sells its signature software to 911 call centers and emergency service providers and is also available to consumers as an app that provides emergency services with access to a caller's camera and location and also runs any caller's identity through any linked government database. It has specifically been marketed by the company itself and the Israeli press as [a solution to mass shootings](#) in the United States and is already being used by at least two U.S. counties.

Israeli media reported that Epstein and Barak were among the company's largest investors. Barak poured millions into the company and it was [recently revealed](#) by *Haaretz* that a significant amount of Barak's total investments in Carbyne was funded by Epstein, making him a "*de facto* partner" in the company. Barak is now [Carbyne's chairman](#).

The company's executive team are all former members of different branches of Israeli intelligence, including the elite military intelligence unit, Unit 8200, that is often likened to Israel's equivalent of the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA). Carbyne's current CEO, Amir Elichai, [served in Unit 8200](#) and tapped former Unit 8200 commander [Pinchas Buchris](#) to serve as the company's director and on its board. In addition to Elichai, another Carbyne co-founder, [Lital Leshem](#), also served in Unit 8200 and later worked for Israeli private spy company Black Cube. Leshem now works for a subsidiary of Erik Prince's company Frontier Services Group, according to the independent media outlet *Narativ*.

The company also includes several tie-ins to the Trump administration, including Palantir founder and Trump ally Peter Thiel — [an investor](#) in Carbyne. In addition, Carbyne's [board of advisers](#) includes former Palantir employee Trae Stephens, who was a member of the Trump transition team, as well as former Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff. [Trump donor and New York real-estate developer](#) Eliot Tawill is also on [Carbyne's board](#), alongside Ehud Barak and Pinchas Buchris.

Narativ, which wrote the first expose on Carbyne after Epstein's arrest, noted that the Chinese government uses a smartphone app very similar to Carbyne as part of its mass surveillance apparatus, even though the original purpose of the app was for improved emergency reporting. According to *Narativ*, the Chinese Carbyne-equivalent "monitors every aspect of a user's life, including personal conversations, power usage, and tracks a user's movement."

Given the history of Robert Maxwell — the father of Epstein's long-time "girlfriend" and young-girl-procuring madam, Ghislaine Maxwell — in promoting the sale of Carbyne's modified Promis software, which was also marketed as a tool to improve government efficacy but was actually a tool of mass surveillance for the benefit of Israeli intelligence, the overlap between Carbyne and Promis is troubling and warrants further investigation.

It is also worth noting that Unit 8200-connected tech start-ups are being widely integrated into U.S. companies and have developed close ties to the U.S. military-industrial complex, with Carbyne being just one example of that trend.

As *MintPress* [previously reported](#), Unit 8200-linked outfits like Team8 have recently hired former National Security Agency (NSA) Director Mike Rogers as a senior advisor and gained prominent Silicon Valley figures, including former Google CEO Eric Schmidt, as key investors. Many American technology companies, from Intel to Google to Microsoft, [have merged with](#) several Unit 8200-connected start-ups in recent years and have been moving many key jobs and operations to Israel with [backing from key Republican donors like Paul Singer](#). Many of those same companies, particularly Google and Microsoft, are also major U.S. government contractors.

Who was Epstein really working for?

Even though Jeffrey Epstein appears to have had ties to the Mossad, this series has revealed that the networks to which Epstein was connected were not Mossad-exclusive, as many of the individuals close to Epstein — Leslie Wexner, for instance — were part of a mob-connected class of oligarchs with deep ties to both the U.S. and Israel. As was discussed in Part I of this series, the sharing of "intelligence" (i.e., blackmail) between intelligence agencies and the same organized crime network connected to the Mega Group goes back decades. With Leslie Wexner of the Mega Group as Epstein's chief patron, as opposed to a financier with direct ties to the Mossad, a similar relationship is more than likely in the case of the sexual blackmail operation that Epstein ran.

Given that intelligence agencies in both the U.S. and elsewhere often conduct covert operations for the benefit of oligarchs and large corporations as opposed to "national security interest," Epstein's ties to the Mega Group suggest that this group holds a unique status and influence in both the governments of the U.S. and of Israel, as well as in other countries (e.g., Russia) that were not explored in this report. This is by virtue of their role as key political donors in both countries, as well as the fact that several of them own powerful companies or financial institutions in both countries. Indeed, many members of the Mega Group have deep ties to Israel's political class, including to Netanyahu and Ehud Barak as well as to now-deceased figures like Shimon Peres, and to members of the American political class.

Ultimately, the picture painted by the evidence is not a direct tie to a single intelligence agency but a web linking key members of the Mega Group, politicians, and officials in both the U.S. and Israel, and an organized-crime network with deep business and intelligence ties in both nations.

Though this series has so far focused on the ties of this network to main Republican Party affiliates, the next and final installment will reveal the ties developed between this web and the Clintons. As will be revealed, despite the Clintons' willingness to embrace corrupt dealings during the span of their political careers, their mostly friendly relationship with this network still saw them use the power of sexual blackmail to obtain certain policy decisions that were favorable to their personal and financial interests but not to the Clintons' political reputation or agendas.

Editor's note | The original version of this article incorrectly stated that Rafi Eitan was interested in repurposing the American-made Promise software to restore his standing in Israel's intelligence community caused by the fall-out from the Pollard Affair. The Pollard Affair occurred three years after Eitan had succeeded in repurposing the software and MintPress has removed that incorrect information from the article and regrets the error.

This article also originally neglected to mention that Eitan, at the time of his collaboration with Earl Brian to repurpose the Promis software, was the director of the now-defunct Israeli military intelligence agency Lekem at the time of those events and that information has been added to the story.

Seymour Hersh's book The Samson Option: Israel's Nuclear Arsenal and American Foreign Policy does not call Robert Maxwell an "agent" of the Mossad, as was stated originally in this report, but does allege clear links and cooperation between Maxwell and the Mossad. This report was updated to reflect this more accurate description.

Feature photo | Graphic by Claudio Cabrera

Whitney Webb is a MintPress News journalist based in Chile. She has contributed to several independent media outlets including Global Research, EcoWatch, the Ron Paul Institute and 21st Century Wire, among others. She has made several radio and television appearances and is the 2019 winner of the Serena Shim Award for Uncompromised Integrity in Journalism.

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